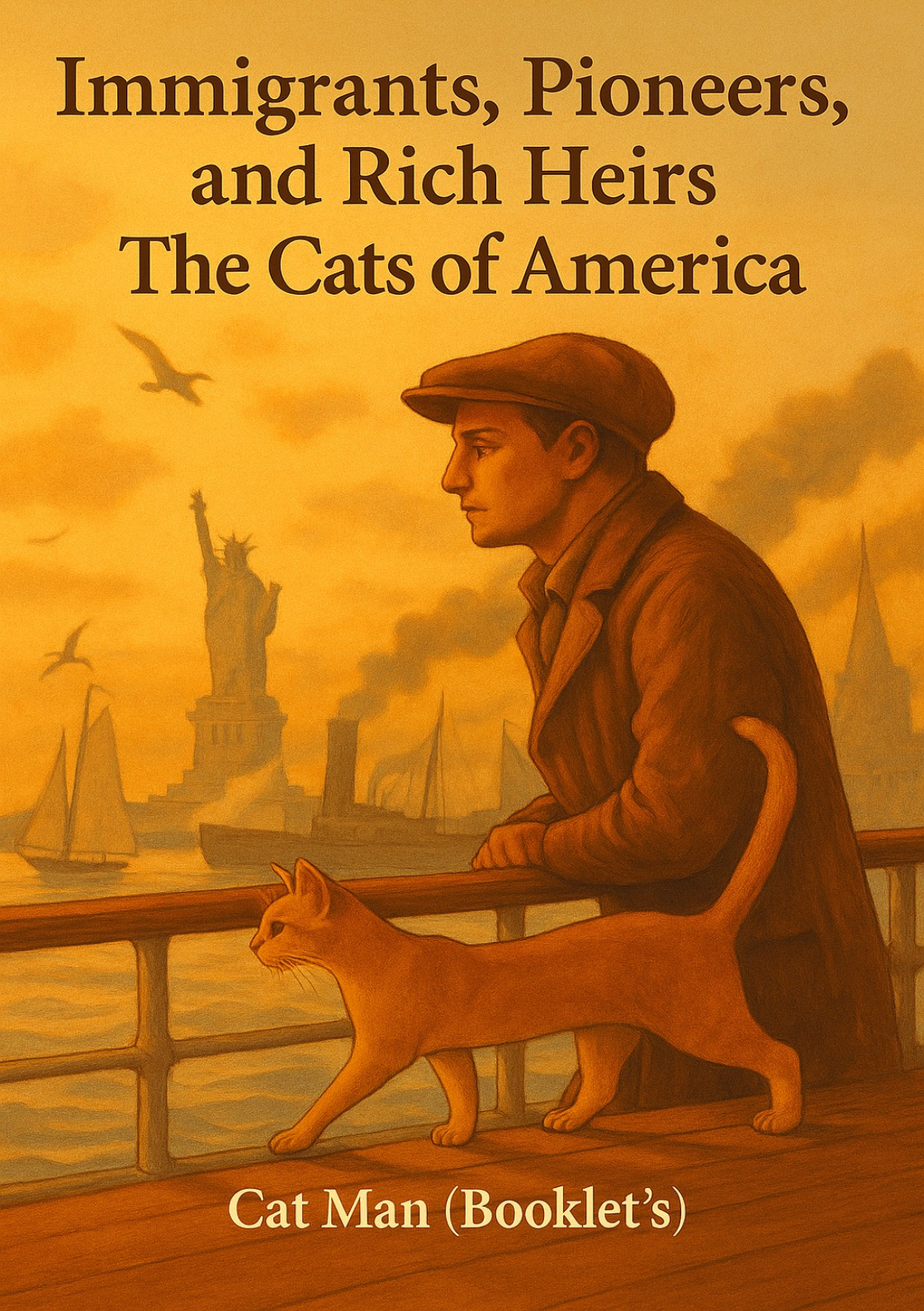
Immigrants, Pioneers, and Rich Heirs
The Cats of America



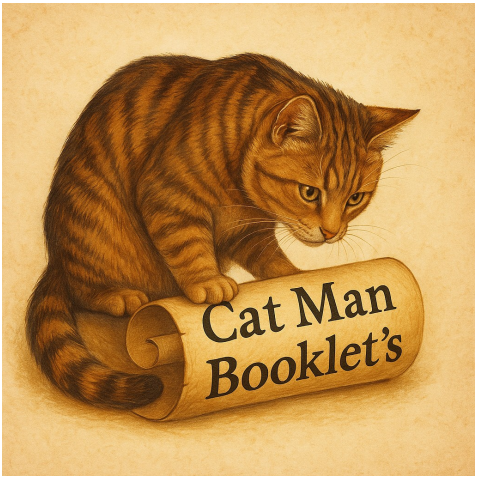
Cat Man (Booklet's)

About *Cat Man (Booklet's)*

Cat Man (Booklet's) is a collection of small, illustrated booklets devoted to the knowledge, history, and soul of the domestic cat. Each volume focuses on a different aspect of feline life — from care and health to culture, belief, and the many ways cats have shared our world.

The booklets are created with the same intention: to preserve facts and stories that might otherwise be forgotten, and to present them with warmth, clarity, and respect. They are meant for everyone who feels that a cat is more than a pet — a presence, a mystery, and a reflection of life itself.

Every booklet is both a quiet read and a tribute to the bond between humans and cats — a connection that has endured through centuries and will never fade.



Immigrants, Pioneers, and Rich Heirs

The Cats of America

Chapter 1
The First Encounters

"She was the first living creature in all that strange northern city who seemed to answer the questioning look in his eyes."

(Tennessee Williams, "The Malediction")

It was a cat that offered this first look of friendship to the stranger — a worker, an immigrant newly arrived from Italy. His name was Lucio, and it almost seemed to him as if the cat were speaking to him: "Oh! You are Lucio! I have been sitting here a long, long time, waiting for you!"

So begins Tennessee Williams's short story *The Malediction*. The cat, called *Nitchevo*, had been named by a Russian immigrant to whom it had perhaps once shown a similar kindness.

Lucio smiled at the animal and climbed the few steps toward her.
"The cat did not move. It purred very faintly — a sound that was barely a sound, a delicate trembling in the pale afternoon air. Its amber eyes did not look, but slowly closed, anticipating the touch of a hand. Lucio's fingers brushed the soft crown of its head and slid down the bony, furry ridge of its back. Beneath his hand he felt the faint tremor of its body and its purring. It slightly raised its head to look up at him — a feminine movement, the movement of a woman lifting her face to her lover in an

embrace, a quick, involuntary glance, as natural as breathing."

Many immigrants must have experienced such an encounter in later times. Yet the first Europeans who set foot on the American continent were not greeted by any cat at all — for there were no domestic cats in America then.

It is said that Columbus was presented with a cat as a gift of hospitality: "of normal size, brown-grey in color, and provided with a long tail," writes Thomas Bewick in his *General History of Quadrupeds* (1790). If it truly was an ordinary cat, it must have descended from the few that may already have arrived with the Vikings. More likely, though, it was a captured wildcat, and it probably greeted Columbus not with soft purring but with the hiss of a puma, jaguar, or some other feline of the forest.

The indigenous peoples of North and South America lived among cats, yet they never domesticated them. They were hunters, not farmers; they lived in tents, not houses; they owned no granaries. Why, then, would they have needed domestic cats?

From the sheer number of wildcat species found in the Americas, the zoologist Ida M. Mellen (*The Science and the Mystery of the Cat*, 1946) concluded that the cat family itself evolved on this continent some forty million

years ago — fossil remains date back to the early Oligocene.

The way these cats appeared to the ancient inhabitants can still be seen in pre-Columbian art. Enormous feline faces stare from the walls of Maya temples in Guatemala and Yucatán — fierce visages meant to frighten away evil spirits and remind pilgrims to be devout. Similarly grim cat masks adorned the shields of Inca warriors, intended to terrify their enemies. Yet the Inca also shaped gentler feline figures in pottery and woven cloth.

Among the civilization of Chavín de Huántar — the earliest known high culture of South America (c. 1200–400 BCE) — there even existed a cat-like deity. Stone statues of this "lion cat" were found 300 kilometers north of Lima: bloodthirsty creatures clutching human heads in their claws. Perhaps this worship served to appease the wild predators that often threatened the people.

All these pre-Columbian cats were, of course, no household companions. The first domestic cats imported from Europe later interbred with native wild species, creating several new varieties. One of them became famous in Paraguay — a snake-hunting cat known for its daring technique. When facing a rattlesnake, it would not attack at once but circle rapidly, forcing the snake to keep turning until it grew exhausted. Then the cat would strike, leaping for the neck and delivering the fatal blow.

Chapter 2
Ship Cats

Every ship that ever reached the American coast carried at least one cat on board. In the age of discovery, attempting a voyage across the Atlantic without cats would have been life-threatening. The crossing could last for weeks, and if rats and mice had been free to raid the stores, passengers and crew alike would have starved.

Even the Spanish never forgot to take cats with them, although at that very time the Inquisition raged most fiercely against the animal and its reputation in Europe was generally poor. The presence of cats is recorded only for the *Mayflower*, yet it is certain that cats went ashore from most immigrant ships — the forebears of America's present-day cat population, the feline pioneers.

American cats have remained aware of their origins. The most seaworthy of them still live on ships today. They go ashore wherever the vessel docks, but they possess a sixth sense for noticing when their ship is about to depart again. They enjoy every shore leave like true sailors, roaming through warehouses and the city's more dubious quarters, sometimes a little too fond of adventure.

They feel equally at home in any port of the world. Yet when their ship sails, they are always back on board without being called. They recognize the exact tone of their ship's siren and never miss the sounds of imminent

departure. And if they do happen to miss their ship, they will, by every possible means, find a way to reach it again at the next port.

Minnie, for example — the ship's cat of the steamer *St. George* — followed her vessel halfway around the world. She had not even missed the departure; rather, she had been dismissed. After too many litters on board, she had become unpopular. A sailor set *Minnie* down in New York at the intersection of Broadway and 72nd Street, wished her luck, and took his leave forever. That same night the steamer — naturally equipped with a new cat — sailed away. Six months later, *Minnie* boarded the *St. George* again in Singapore, as if she had been gone only a few hours. She had followed her home ship via Bermuda, Cape Town, and Hong Kong, changing vessels in each of those ports.

But not only are the cats devoted to their ships; the sailors, too, are devoted to their ship cats — even though there are now other ways to control rodents. The 17,000-ton New York steamer *Subamerican* once came to an abrupt halt in mid-ocean: *Olaf*, the ship's tomcat, had fallen overboard! Despite heavy seas, the first officer and six sailors immediately lowered a boat to rescue the desperate swimmer.

Chapter 3
The Cat on the "Frontier"

The Encyclopedia Americana makes an interesting observation:

"Less attention has been paid to the influence of the domestic cat on American civilization than it deserves. The advance of agriculture and the settlement of the vast forests and prairies were only possible thanks to this often misused and misunderstood animal. How much food the cats saved, how much property they protected from destruction, and how many plagues of pests they kept in check since America was settled — it cannot be measured. Without their constant vigilance, the great cities would be overrun by rats and mice in no time."

Together with the settlers who pushed ever deeper into the continent — from the west coast and from the south — the cats also migrated as indispensable helpers.

Father Ignaz Pfefferkorn, who travelled from Mexico to California with other monks in the eighteenth century, wrote that every mission station along his route was well supplied with cats, which protected food stores and helped prevent disease.

Juan de Anza, who explored the route from Mexico to San Francisco in 1775–1776 and founded a number of missions, always carried several baskets of cats on a

mule. He distributed them to the new settlements along his way. In the old doors of the stations of San Gabriel, San Fernando, San Juan y Baptista, and Santa Inés, one can still see the holes that were cut into the wood for the free passage of the cats.

Around this time a small souvenir trade arose in Mexico, producing cats made of ceramic, clay, wood, or papier-mâché. The locals chose this animal because it was so highly valued by the foreigners. Today such figures are treasured collector's items among American cat lovers.

In 1847, **Brigham Young** led not only the Mormons but also a cat into the Salt Lake Valley — and later had about sixty more follow in a special wagon. The **Cherokee, Choctaw, Seminole, Chickasaw, and Creek** tribes also adopted the cat from the whites. They soon came to appreciate its gentle, domestic nature, and when they were forced from their lands to Oklahoma in 1830, they took all of their cats with them — not a single one was left behind.

How essential the cat was in the settlement of America can be seen from the boldness of the country's mice. One American fable tells of such a cheeky mouse that even managed to intimidate the house cat:

All day long, there was much activity in the kitchen and pantry, for the cat was away and the mice were playing merrily. But then the cat returned. "Careful, the cat,"

whispered Father Mouse. “Quick, hide,” commanded Mother Mouse, and all the mice — except one — slipped into the cracks of the wall. The exception was a somewhat eccentric young mouse named **Mervyn**, who had once cheekily bitten a bulldog’s ear and escaped unharmed. He never learned that the bulldog had been stuffed, and so he continued to believe himself invincible.

The cat, whose name was **Kralletta**, entered the pantry and was astonished to find Mervyn calmly nibbling a piece of cheese rind. She crept closer, but before she could pounce, he turned, spat a crumb of cheese into her eye, and showered her with insults.

“Who let you out of the bag?” Mervyn sneered. “Put on your pajamas and take a nap.” With supreme arrogance, he went back to his cheese.
“Stay calm, Kralletta,” the cat told herself. “It must be some kind of trick. Maybe the mouse has swallowed poison, hoping I’ll eat him and die — then his descendants will call him a hero.”

But Mervyn mocked her again, squeaking in a childish voice: “You silly old cow! The cat’s from the police, and she’s after poor little me!” He waved his tail tauntingly.
“Easy, my girl,” Kralletta said to herself. “It’s probably a fake mouse — mechanical, with a built-in voice. If I touch it, it’ll explode and blow me to bits. They’re clever, but not that clever.”

“If you had any meat on your bones, someone could make soup out of you,” Mervyn jeered.
Despite this unforgivable insult, Kralletta didn’t raise a paw. She turned away, strutted into the living room, curled up on the cushion by the fireplace, and closed her eyes.

When Mervyn returned to his family, everyone — parents, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts — stared in disbelief to see him alive. In their joy, they held a great feast with the finest cheese. “She didn’t dare touch me,” Mervyn boasted. “I could take on every cat in the Catskill Mountains!”
He finished his cheese, went to bed, and fell fast asleep.

Chapter 4
The Value of the Cat

Of course, cats did not always let themselves be intimidated by mice as in the story of Mervyn and Kralletta. The settlers' cats did their work diligently and were highly valued for it. In fact, they could be worth a small fortune.

A diary kept by an employee of the **Missouri Fur Company** in 1812 records the following:

"This morning we lost our old cat at camp. We had already set out when I noticed her absence. Manuel Lisa sent a man back to look for her, and he did not return until evening. The entry may sound ridiculous — if a cat were not worth more than a good horse in this country. There are countless mice, and for lack of cats, the company at Gros Ventres has already suffered losses of several thousand dollars because goods were destroyed. Since leaving Bellefontaine, I have seen every night that our cat caught between four and ten mice and brought them to her kittens."

The statement that a cat was worth more than a good horse was no exaggeration. As long as cats were scarce in America, they were traded at astonishing prices. The first cat to reach **Paraguay** from Europe was sold for the equivalent of a pound of pure gold.

The conquistador **Herrera** is said to have paid each cat's weight in gold for every one brought to **Peru**.

Later, a genuine **cat trade** flourished in the Midwest. One trapper managed to acquire a few cats from Native Americans — animals originally given to them by French missionaries as a kind of "development aid." He made sure they bred well and then travelled with the kittens in his cart. Pots, brooms, and soap were stacked on top, while the kittens purred contentedly among the wares. In every village, he would tie a small board around his neck, lay out his goods — shaving cream, chewing tobacco, suspenders, tools, paper — and between them, the kittens sat, blissfully unaware that they were the most valuable items on display. He charged twenty to twenty-five dollars apiece.

The idea spread quickly. Soon, such cat traders travelled the whole country. One of them, hearing of the gold rush in **Klondike**, reasoned that he could sell his cats to the prospectors for a fortune. He was right. The miners there had plenty of gold but nothing to eat; the mice had devoured their supplies. The trader arrived with two cats and sold them within the first hour — each for two hefty gold nuggets.

Perhaps it was one of these cats that **Mark Twain** later wrote about. The prospector family who acquired the animal named it *Tom Quartz*. This Gold Rush cat could not protect her masters' food, for they had none — but

she saved their lives in another way. Each day she went hunting and returned to the tent each night with a rabbit. Without Tom Quartz, the prospectors' pots would have stayed empty, and they would have starved.

Another dealer even started a kind of **mail-order cat business**. He had the greatest success when he sent two cats to **Memphis, Tennessee**, where a typhus epidemic had broken out — caused by rats. Desperate, the city's mayor offered a five-thousand-dollar reward for anyone who could stop the plague. The cat dealer responded, claiming to possess a proven and infallible remedy, and sent a box by express delivery.

When the officials opened it, two half-starved cats sprang out and ran off. The furious mayor sued the dealer — but by the time the case went to court, the rats were gone and the epidemic was ending. The court ruled that the reward had to be paid in full.

Cats were profitable not only for prospectors and plague-ridden towns. In some colonies — for instance, **Pennsylvania in 1749** — local authorities paid bounties for mouse, rat, or squirrel tails. Anyone with an efficient cat could quickly recover its purchase price, quite apart from the fact that a cat was in any case a most profitable, if not indispensable, investment.

Tom Quartz, die Goldrausch-Katze

Chapter 5
Persecuted Helpers

Despite their usefulness, cats were not spared from persecution in America either. The superstitions that had clung to them for centuries in Europe crossed the Atlantic along with the settlers. Some religious zealots branded them as “creatures of Satan,” while others believed they brought misfortune on board ships or into houses if they entered uninvited.

In the Puritan colonies, particularly in **New England**, it was once claimed that witches kept cats as their “familiars” — demonic companions who carried out evil deeds on their behalf. During the **Salem witch trials** of 1692, several defendants were accused of turning themselves into black cats or sending cats to torment their victims in the night.

In those years, many innocent animals were hunted, drowned, or burned alongside their owners. Yet even at the height of this madness, a few voices spoke out in defense of the cat. A pamphlet printed in Boston in 1701 argued that no creature capable of such “grace and usefulness” could truly be evil.

In later centuries, the hostility faded, but it never disappeared completely. Black cats, in particular, continued to suffer under old prejudices — a shadow that

still lingers today. Even so, the cat endured and quietly reclaimed her place in American homes.

By the nineteenth century, she had become an accepted part of daily life, not only on farms and in small towns but even in the bustling cities. Newspapers of the period carried affectionate anecdotes about famous cats, and artists began to paint them not as symbols of darkness but as loyal companions and graceful muses.

The same hands that had once driven them away now built them soft beds by the hearth. From despised witches' beasts, the cats of America had become cherished household members — silent, watchful, and indispensable.

Chapter 6
The American Cat Today

Today, the American cat no longer has to fear persecution or prove her worth. She has become a beloved member of the family — sometimes even more pampered than her European cousins. There are cat clubs, cat shows, and even cat hotels. Newspapers and magazines publish regular columns about feline behavior, health, and care.

The United States has produced its own famous cat breeds, the best known being the **Maine Coon** — a large, gentle, long-haired cat, often striped, with a bushy tail like a raccoon's. Originally a farm and ship cat from the northeastern states, it is now one of the most popular purebred cats in the country.

Another native breed is the **American Shorthair**, descended from the tough working cats brought over by early settlers. Strong, resilient, and with a calm temperament, it embodies the practical spirit of its homeland.

In cities like New York, Chicago, and San Francisco, cats are often kept in apartments, while in the countryside they still roam freely, hunting mice in barns and fields as they always have. In Alaska and the far north, they even share sleds and cabins with trappers and explorers, enduring the same hardships as their human companions.

The cat has long since conquered the American heart. She appears in literature, on the radio, in films, and in television series. From **Mark Twain's Tom Quartz** to the unforgettable **Garfield**, she has become part of popular culture — humorous, self-willed, and unmistakably individual.

Wherever people have settled, built, and dreamed, the cat has been there too — a quiet observer of human striving. She came to America as a ship's stowaway, found work on the frontier, and finally claimed her place by the fireside. Her story mirrors that of the nation itself: courage, endurance, and the love of freedom.

Chapter 7
State Cats

Until 1988, only the United States of America could boast of having “state birds,” “state flowers,” and “state trees.” That year, Massachusetts became the first to go a step further and also name a **state cat** — the elegant and self-confident **Tabby**.

The idea caught on quickly. Maryland chose the **Calico Cat**, Tennessee the **Tennessee Bobtail**, and Colorado declared the **Maine Coon** its official feline representative.

The selection of a “state cat” is rarely random. Each one represents the character and history of its home: independence, courage, endurance — and sometimes the quiet dignity that cats embody everywhere.

In the small town of Talkeetna, Alaska, the cat **Stubbs** even became **mayor**. For twenty years he sat in the local store, where citizens came to “discuss politics” while he dozed. Tourists from all over the world visited to see the mayor who governed with a purr instead of a pen.

Even today, many states honour cats in schools and animal-welfare projects. They appear in parades, on postage stamps, and in public libraries as reading mascots.

It seems that wherever Americans look for a symbol of grace and independence, they end up finding it — in the cat.

Chapter 8
Cats in Film and Literature

Cats have always had a special gift for finding their way into the arts.

They appear in paintings, poems, novels, and — since the invention of the camera — on film.

Whether as mysterious companions, mischievous spirits, or loyal friends, they lend an air of elegance and quiet irony to every story they enter.

In the early days of cinema, cats often appeared as comic relief in short silent films. Later, they became symbols of mystery or charm — from the black cat in *The Black Cat* (1934) to the playful Siamese in *Lady and the Tramp* and the rebellious alley cat in *The Aristocats*.

Writers, too, have long been fascinated by them. Charles Baudelaire, T. S. Eliot, Colette, Mark Twain, and Ernest Hemingway all wrote of cats — sometimes as mirrors of human emotion, sometimes as beings whose serenity humans could only envy.

But perhaps no story has ever captured the cat's wisdom, tenderness, and humour better than the one between **Jennie** and the boy **Peter**.

WHEN IN DOUBT – WASH!

"When in doubt about something — wash! That is the basic rule," said Jennie.

With her tail neatly curled around her paws she sat very straight and rather prim — almost like a schoolteacher, Peter thought — right under Napoleon's initials and the crown at the head of the big bed.

"If you've done something and someone scolds you — wash quickly," Jennie went on.

"If you lose your balance and fall off something — wash! If you are in a fierce argument and wish to pause until you have composed yourself, just start washing.

Don't forget: all cats respect one another when they wash. That is our first rule of social behaviour, and you must follow it too.

Whatever situation or difficulty you may find yourself in, you can't go wrong if you wash.

If you come into a room full of people you don't know, all talking at once and confusing you, just sit down among them and wash a bit. They'll soon quieten down and look at you.

If any sudden noise startles you so that you jump, and someone you know has seen you frightened — start washing at once.

If someone calls you and you don't feel like going but don't wish to offend them — wash.

If you are on your way somewhere and suddenly forget where you were going, sit down and wash for a moment. You'll remember.

If something hurts, wash it.
If you're tired of playing with someone who kindly took the time to entertain you and you'd like to stop without hurting their feelings — wash quietly.
Ah, there are dozens of occasions.
If you're sitting by a closed door and angry because nobody opens it — wash a little and forget it!
If someone in the same room is stroking another cat or a dog and you're jealous — never mind, wash.
If you're sad — wash your sadness away.
If someone picks you up whom you don't like, or who smells unpleasant — wash the smell off yourself so that they notice.
If you're overcome with emotion, the best way to master it is to wash quickly.
At any time, in any place, for any reason, whenever you need fresh air or a moment's peace to think — wash!"
"And," Jennie concluded, drawing a deep breath, "of course you wash to get clean and stay clean."
"Oh dear," said Peter anxiously, "I shall never remember all that."
"You don't have to," Jennie replied.
"You only need to remember one rule: **when in doubt — wash!**"

Based on the chapter "Einwanderer, Pioniere und reiche Erben – Die Katzen Amerikas" from the book *Mau Mao Miau – Die Katze durch die Jahrtausende* by Mischa Damjan and Rudolf Schilling, Eugen Diederichs Verlag.

Präsident Lincoln

For your notes

For your notes

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